

[From the Brattleboro Reformer, Sept. 8, 2009]

YOUR GOVERNMENT, ONLINE!
(By Howard Weiss-Tisman)

BRATTLEBORO.—Michael Knapp thinks the government can do a better job of getting data into the hands of average Americans.

Knapp, who is Managing Director of GreenRiver.org, a Brattleboro software development company, believes that social change will come after more citizens learn more about their government and he's got a plan to make that happen.

GreenRiver.org, along with Intellidimension, another Brattleboro high tech company, is one of three finalists in a national competition to help the U.S. government revamp how it gets information into the hands of the public.

The two Southern Vermont companies joined together to design a Web site that would make it easier for citizens to access the thousands of pages of data that the various government agencies produce every year.

And the two small Main Street firms, which went up against 46 other mostly larger and more heavily financed companies from all over the United States, now have a chance to meet with some powerful Washington insiders to change how government information is delivered to the public.

"Too much data produces nothing but noise. But if we can get information into people's hands that is presented well and clearly and accurately people will make more informed decisions," Knapp said from his office overlooking the Connecticut River. "We're trying to help people make connections, so they can start to take control of their communities."

Knapp and his cohorts entered the Apps for America contest, which is sponsored by The Sunlight Foundation, a non-partisan Washington group dedicated to increasing government transparency.

The Brattleboro companies developed their Web site, ThisWeKnow.org, that allows the user to enter a location in the search engine.

Reports from across the government that have recorded information on that location are gathered and the user can compare, for instance, a town's cancer rate with the toxic chemicals released by nearby factories and political contributions to area lawmakers.

Knapp said all of the various government agencies issue the reports and put out press releases occasionally on the data, but the Web site "takes the middleman out of the information presentation. Instead of the agencies controlling the story," Knapp said, "you get to tell the story."

Intellidimension Vice President of Product Development, Derrish Repchick, said the two companies put in weeks worth of work developing the site. They are flying to Washington next week to present their site, and Vivek Kundra, the Obama Administration's Federal Chief Information Officer, is expected to check out the work of the three finalists.

"It was a huge amount of data we had to work with. It was a challenge," said Repchick, who was responsible for the back end of the Web site where all of the data is accessed. "It was also fun and it gets some pretty important eyeballs on you."

Knapp is a big fan of what the Obama Administration has done to make government more transparent but he said there are still countless amounts of information out there that should be more readily available.

The winner of the contest will not necessarily win a government contract but Knapp said the contest and his site is one more way to get every citizen in the country to realize that it is their government and the

fastest way to implement change is by getting them the information they need to demand it.

"We didn't do this for the money," Knapp said about the \$10,000 prize that will go to the winner. "We want to break down all the separate silos of information and have people make connections. We did this because we believe technology can make a better future for everybody."

Voting for the best application is being done online at www.sunlightlabs.com.

RECOGNIZING THE PEASE GREETERS

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the Pease Greeters for their consistent and unwavering support for our brave men and women in uniform passing through New Hampshire on their way to combat assignments in Iraq and Afghanistan or returning home to their loved ones. The Pease Greeters provide a loud and welcoming voice not only to servicemembers from New Hampshire but to all of the soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen who pass through the Pease Air Terminal in Portsmouth, NH.

During the Spring of 2005, when members of the Seacoast Detachment of the Marine Corps League met a flight returning from the Middle East, no one could have known that this small volunteer group of veterans and citizens would be the nucleus of a group that has met every one of the more than 130 flights landing in New Hampshire, however briefly, with soldiers heading to or returning from combat operations overseas. The Greeters, now numbering over 200 members, have helped to ensure that each of the thousands of servicemembers has received the welcome home and best wishes that they so richly deserve.

The Pease Greeters travel from all over New Hampshire to meet every military flight in to Pease, at any hour, day or night. Arriving troops are met with applause, handshakes, and a boisterous welcome, and if the flight is taking them into a combat area, the Pease Greeters assure them that they will be met right there upon their safe return. These honored guests are provided with refreshments and the opportunity to make free phone calls to their loved ones. Each of these events has been recorded and the photographs line the Pease Air Terminal Hall that is known as the "Heroes Walk."

It is my privilege to recognize the time and energy these men and women of the Pease Greeters have devoted and continue to devote to assuring our Armed Forces that their country and its citizens appreciate the sacrifices they and their families are making on our behalf. Thank you to each and every member of the Pease Greeters for providing such a warm welcome home to those returning and a warm memory of home to those departing to carry out their missions.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

CONGRATULATING CAROLINE FORD

• Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, I wish to congratulate and recognize a distinguished Kentuckian, 12-year-old Caroline Ford, a student at Bowling Green Christian Academy, who was recently named a 2009 National Junior Forensic League Championship award winner in San Antonio, TX.

The National Forensic League is a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational honor society, with alumni that include Oprah Winfrey, President Lyndon B. Johnson, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, and countless other members in government, academia, and business. Policy debate, interpretation of dramatic literature, and commentary are just examples of the types of competitions offered by the National Forensic League.

As a participant at one of the most prestigious forensic competitions, Caroline competed against over 100 students from the United States and other nations. Her awards include first place in the original oratory competition and second place in the original poetry competition.

I would like to once again congratulate Ms. Caroline Ford for being named a 2009 National Junior Forensic League Championship award winner. She is truly an inspiration to all Kentuckians, and I wish her the best of luck in her future endeavors. •

REMEMBERING KEN BACON

• Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I was deeply saddened to learn of the death of Ken Bacon on August 15. While Ken had distinguished careers in both journalism and public service, it is his tenure as the head of Refugees International that I would like to highlight. In that capacity, Ken became one of the world's leading advocates for refugees and displaced persons. By adapting and challenging his own organization, he changed the global discussion on refugees and their rights, most recently with his focus on those displaced by climate change.

Whether focused on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, or Iraq, Ken called upon the international community to take seriously the plight of those caught in the midst of conflict—innocent people losing their homes, separated from their families, and sometimes forced to forfeit their dignity to save their lives. As recently as June, Ken testified before a committee of the House of Representatives regarding the millions of Pakistanis displaced by fighting in the North West Frontier Province. He spoke powerfully:

This is not merely a question of funding, though the humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts will need robust financial commitments. The United States also